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ABSTRACT

The study of education systems and educational programs cannot be adequate without reference to those systems' social context. This paper examines the Australian Transition Education program, enacted by the government in 1979, in light of its social context. The program's ostensible purpose was to prepare students for employment. The Liberal government came to office in 1975 on the grounds of superior economic management. In 1979, the party was faced with evidence suggesting a worsening economic crisis. For the 15- to 19-year-old age group, unemployment had surged from 3.4 percent in 1964 to 17 percent in 1979. Government reacted with "dole-bludger" rhetoric that young people chose unemployment--a claim echoed by the media. The situation displayed the crisis tendencies of advanced capitalism discussed by Habermas (1976). Government diverted attention away from itself and toward the education system as a scapegoat, which created a motivation crisis among young people. Because unemployment could no longer be "hidden," a legitimation crisis arose in society. The Transition Education Program appeared in this crisis context, primarily designed to restore confidence in government by relegitimizing the education system. (CJH)

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The Importance of Social Context for an Australian Education Program

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 16-20, 1986.

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Abstract

In November 1979, the Australian Government announced the introduction of a new educational program designed to implement its Transition From School to Work Policy. Its objectives were ostensibly to help students 'at risk' of becoming one of the many early school leavers unable to find employment, and of 'improving' education in general. This paper argues that the emergence of the Transition Education Program is more correctly understood in terms of the social context into which it was introduced. At the time the Program was announced Australia was faced with a series of crises in government and education. The Transition Education Program was primarily designed to restore confidence in the Government by re-legitimising the education system.

The study of education systems and educational programs cannot adequately occur without reference to their social context, for to do so is to ignore vital factors which influence and shape their functioning and development. This paper will examine the Australian Transition Education Program in the light of the social and cultural context within which it was set. The Program was launched in 1979, but to fully comprehend why it was a "Transition Education" Program and why it was given its particular emphases we must go back to events that happened in 1975.

When the Commonwealth Government first announced their Transition from School to Work Policy to the Australian Senate in Canberra on November 22nd 1979, the country was facing a state of economic crisis. Inflation was still high at 9.1%, after having peaked at 15.1% in both 1974 and 1975 under the administration of the previous Labor Government (see Table 1). At the same time unemployment, then estimated at 6.6% by the Commonwealth Employment Service (see Table 2), was higher than it had ever been since the Great Depression of the 1930s. For the Liberal Government announcing the policy, however, the situation was rather more serious than just being the worst economic crisis the country had faced since the depression years of the 1930s; it was, for them, also a crisis of credibility.

Table 1

Year	Inflation	Wage Rise (%)	Budget Surplus (+) or Deficit (-)	
1970	4.9	8.4	$ 201+	(1969-70)
1971	7.2	10.3	$ 519m+	(1970-71)
1972	5.9	11.0	$ 405m+	(1971-72)
1973	9.5	8.9	$ 215m+	(1972-73)
1974	15.1	16.2	$ 211m-	(1973-74)
1975	15.1*	25.4	$1949m-	(1974-75)
1976	13.5	14.4	$2873m-	(1975-76)
1977	12.3	12.4	$1864m-	(1976-77)
1978	8.2	9.9	$2361m-	(1977-78)
1979	9.1	7.7	$2258m-	(1978-79)
1980	10.8	9.5	$ 567m-	(1979-80)

* Inflation was at its highest in January-March of 1975, when it reached 17.6 percent (falling to 13-14 percent within twelve months).

(Source, Jones, 1982)

Table 2

Unemployment figures from the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for May each year.

	CES(%)	ABS(%)
1970	1.0	1.3
1971	1.4	1.5
1972	1.9	2.0
1973	1.5	1.8
1974	2.1	1.6
1975	4.2	4.7
1976	4.3	4.4
1977	5.0	5.5
1978	6.1	6.2
1979	6.6	6.2
1980	6.5	6.2

(Source, Jones 1982)

Table 3
Unemployment Rates

	Looking for full-time work			Looking for part-time work	
	Aged 15-19 years	Aged 20 & older	Total		Total
Year(a)					
1980-81	17.2	4.3	5.8	6.0	5.9
1981-82	17.5	4.7	6.1	6.4	6.2
1982-83	23.6	7.7	9.3	7.2	9.0
Three months to(b)-					
1982 November	21.2	6.8	8.3	7.1	8.1
1983 February	24.5	8.2	9.8	6.9	9.3
May	27.2	8.9	10.8	7.6	10.2
August	27.3	9.0	10.8	7.6	10.3
November	26.5	8.6	10.4	7.8	10.0
Month(b)-					
1983 June	27.1	9.3	11.0	6.9	10.3
July	28.1	8.8	10.7	8.1	10.3
August	26.7	9.0	10.7	7.7	10.2
September	27.5	8.8	10.7	8.7	10.4
October	26.3	8.7	10.5	6.9	9.9
November	25.6	8.3	10.0	7.9	9.6

(a) Rates for each financial year are based on an average of seasonally unadjusted monthly data for the year.

(b) Seasonally adjusted.

(Source, The Treasury, Round-up of Economic Statistics, December, 1983)

Constitutional crisis in Australia

The Liberal Government had come to office in 1975 after a constitutional crisis which led to the previous Government's dismissal by the Governor-General. The crisis developed over the then opposition parties' refusal to pass a Supply Bill in the Senate, and reached its climax with the Governor-General's dismissal of the elected Government. It goes without saying that this course of action was generally regarded as either responsible or outrageous according to commentators' political allegience, but two aspects of the dismissal are of particular interest. One is the suspicion of conspiricy, and the other is the appointment of the minority Liberal Party as the 'caretaker' Government until a general election could be held.

That there was any conspiracy has been the subject of much heated debate and has been, of course, denied by Kerr himself (1978). One well-known political commentator has provided evidence (MacCallum, 1977:183) which indicates that members of the Liberal (opposition) Party had advance knowledge that the Governor-General was prepared to dismiss the Labor Government. My purpose in referring to this, however, is not to debate the actions of the Governor-General nor the propriety with which he acted. My purpose is to indicate that his actions raised a storm of heated and emotive debate in Australian society. Whether one agrees that there was a conspiracy of sorts or not, there can be no doubt that there was an enormous depth of feeling raised over the dismissal of the elected Government; feeling which was also shared by some of conservative political persuasions. These questions, however, were purely academic, because the Liberal Party won solid support from the people in the elections held early in 1980, and they were "returned" to office with a substantial majority.

The Liberal Party fought and won the election on the issue of the management of the country's economy. Indeed the steps taken by them to block the Supply bills in the Senate, which generated the constitutional crisis

culminating in the dismissal of the Labor Government, was rationalised to the public as the only responsible course of action in view of the state of the economy. This they claimed to be in a state of crisis due to the alleged economic incompetence of the Labor Government. The Liberals won the election with a campaign promising more capable economic management, during which they used the slogan "Turn on the Lights", graphically alluding to the conditions of hardship experienced during World War II to suggest the prospect of a return to 'normal' conditions under their administration after the experience of privation and chaos under Labor.

However, after having come to power in 1975 on the grounds of superior economic management, and pointing to statistical evidence of inflation and unemployment to justify their claims, this same party, still in office in 1979, was now faced with statistical evidence suggesting not only a continuing but a worsening economic crisis. Because of the events of November 1975, the crisis for this Government was not merely an economic one but was also a crisis of confidence. Indeed, it was a situation displaying all the crisis tendencies of advanced capitalism as proposed by Habermas (1976).

Economic crisis in Western Capitalism

Economic crisis is endemic to capitalist societies, and a massive amount of energy is expended in observing and commenting upon economic factors in society, presumably to facilitate appropriate manipulation of the economy in order to place bounds upon and to some extent 'control' crises. Speaking about the economy of the U.S.A., O'Connor (1981) argues that during the 1960s and 1970s there was a decline in the rate of profit and that this was accompanied by inflation, and industrial and social unrest leading to an investment strike in the mid-1970s. The recession of 1974 led to a restructuring of capital in the late 1970s/early 1980s which required, "a massive reduction in working class living standards" (1981:110).

While exact parallels cannot be drawn, nevertheless there is a very familiar ring to O'Connor's analysis which has some correspondence to the Australian situation.

Commentators certainly agree that similar crisis conditions to those outlined by O'Connor for the U.S.A. from the late 1960s onwards also existed in Australia (Gilmour & Lansbury 1978, Windschuttle 1979, Theophanous 1980, Jones 1982). They also share the view that the Australian economy was characterised by a long period of boom conditions after World War II which continued until the late 1960s due to an expansion of the industrialised base established during the war and growing demands for the 'new' consumer produce of industrialisation, such as refrigerators, washing machines and motor cars, which had formerly been the luxury goods of the privileged few. During this period there had been a series of crises but the shock of these had been largely contained by the sustained demand for the new consumer goods of industrialism, thus contributing to the situation where crises in the Australian capitalist economy were conventionally regarded as attributable to errors of management rather than a quality inherent in capitalism itself (Windschutle, 1979).

The economic orthodoxy of this period of relative growth during the 1950s and 1960s was based on Keynesian principles which argued that the economy was geared to effective demand. Money supply and interest rates were of secondary importance to the view that production and employment were determined by demand, hence the belief that crisis tendencies resulted from errors of management in stimulating demand appropriately. However, as recession descended on the Western economies, Keynesian economic theory was displaced by the monetarist theories of Milton Friedman.

O'Connor has argued (1981:114ff) that during the 'boom' period following World War II the working class in the U.S.A. made considerable gains in living standards, and that following on from a decline in profit during the 1960s and

early 1970s there was a counter-attack by capital eager to maintain its position at the expense of a reduction in the living standards of the working class. This was achieved on one hand by an investment strike, and on the other hand by economic/political measures which employed the monetarist policies of Friedmanite economics.

Windschuttle argues a similar case for Australia (1979:20). Theophanous (1980), however, goes much further. While agreeing that there was indeed a shift of faith away from Keynesian to the reassertion of Friedmanite economics in the mid 1970s and that this was indicative of an organisation by capital against the working class in order to preserve its own position at the expense of reducing workers' living standards, he also argues that in Australia capital was faced with a more acute threat in the presence of a reformist Labor government which had to be contained. It was this perceived threat that, in his view, ultimately led to the dismissal of the Whitlam government.

Thus Theophanous argues that in addition to a growing economic crisis sweeping international capitalism, this was exacerbated in Australia by a reformist government. Against these two crises, capital organised itself. He gives an account (1980:328ff) of how he believes capital mobilised its opposition against Whitlam, and particularly the role of the media in convincing the public that the Labor government was 'reprehensible' and riddled with 'scandal'. The result, as he sees it, was that,

> At first reluctant to abandon his cherished welfare programs and his plans to bring mineral resources under government control, Whitlam finally buckled under the demands of the ruling class (which he represented as merely the demands of the economic situation). However, by this stage the mobilistion against him had reached an irreversable stage: it was too little, too late as far as the ruling class was concerned (Theophanous, 1980:261).

Windschuttle concurs, saying,

> The Labor Party has drawn from the defeats of 1975 and 1977 the lesson that the Whitlam period was too daring and that future policies ought to be more 'realistic', which means more attuned to the demands of employers and the news media (Windschuttle, 1979:281).

It should be realised, of course, that the demands of employers are defacto the demands of capital, and also that the news media provides a support structure for capital (Windschuttle, 1984).

In summary then, it is fair to say that in 1975 the Liberal party came to power under circumstances which were highly contentious, and that the economy was in a state of crisis greater than any since the Great Depression. In addition it can be noted that this crisis was one shared by Western Capitalism in general, but was to some extent magnified by the reformist policies of the Australian Labor government which was willing to attempt social reforms within the capitalist framework but not political reforms which would alter the economic base. Moreover the worldwide economic crisis of capitalism was marked by the reassertion of Friedmanite economic theory, an orthodoxy which legitimised the reduction of working class conditions in support of capital, which in Habermas' view (1979:194) would be likely to provoke legitimation crisis. This was also true of both major Australian political parties which showed very little difference from each other by the end of 1975 (in fact it has been argued that this was so even before the dismissal in 1975, e.g. see Catley and McFarlane 1974).

Economic and political-administrative systems in crisis

Evidence indicates (tables 1, 2 and 3) that the Australian economy was developing a state of crisis. Inflation, which peaked in 1975 and fell to 8.2% in 1978 under the Fraser government, began to rise again in 1979, although not to the previous high level. Unemployment figures, however, continued their relentless climb until these also peaked at 11% in June 1983 (table 3). From whatever perspective, things looked bad.

Some earlier reactions to the crisis have been noted, particularly the shift from Keynesian to Friedmanite economic theory by both major political parties. However, in the (then Opposition) Liberal Party this change was

mainly brought about by the selection of Malcolm Fraser as its new leader after his successful putsch against his former leader Billy Snedden in March 1975, for Fraser was a firm advocate of Friedmanite monetarist policies. The Labor Party, in contrast, seems to have accepted the change in a desperate bid to reassert its control on the economy and halt the disasterous rise in inflation.

Theophanous (1980) describes the events, particularly the demise of the socialists in senior cabinet portfolios, which eventually culminated in the dismissal of the Labor Party. He argues that the removal of Cairns the Treasurer, Cameron the Minister for Labor, and Connor the Minister for Minerals and Energy, was more than conventional practice to repremand ministers guilty of incompetence or malfeasance. Indeed he contrasts Whitlam's actions to those of Fraser's, who, in the face of more serious ministerial scandals when the Liberals were in power, supported his ministers (Theophanous, 1980:370). He argues that Whitlam, having decided to abandon his program of reform in favour of massive support for capital, removed these socialist ministers as a symbolic gesture as much as for any other reason. The result for Labor has already been noted, and in Theophanous' view, the two gestures made by Labor to capital, viz. the removal of key socialists from positions of power and the tough Hayden budget of 1975, were of no help to them and the party was dismissed from government.

Once in office, however, the Liberal Party was equally impotent to halt the recession. On the contrary, as the statistics indicate, things got worse. Consequently, the explanations they gave for the causes of the crisis before they assumed government are different to those given after the event.

Before taking office in November 1975, the Liberal Party, as is common in politics, had a simple view of what caused the recession, i.e. it was the fault of their opponents, the Labor Party. On one hand, it was argued, Labor had run too large budget deficits, thus causing inflation, ruining business

confidence and creating unemployment. On the other hand, they had encouraged workers to seek too large increases in wages, which produced the 'real wage overhang'. Of this theory Windschuttle says, that it,

> is concerned less with the origins of the recession and more with its continuation. The crisis will not abate, this theory holds, until wages revert to the 'normal' levels of the 1960s and capital regains its 'natural' share of national income (Windschuttle, 1979:23).

A more scathing commentary on this theory comes from Abbey and Catley, who say,

> the economics profession has now so degenerated that the major debate of 1978 concerned the 'real wage overhang'. The Fraser Government, taking up the Labor Government's banality that 'one man's pay rise is another man's job', argued to the Arbitration Commission that wages had risen faster than productivity since 1973 and as a result labour was pricing itself out of the market. Thus the anachronistic Say's Law, laid to rest temporarily by both Marxists and Keynesians, was revived. One economist attributed 150,000 of the unemployed to this 'imbalance'. Another felt it might be rectified by abolishing award rates for those under 21 years of age and invented the term 'union voluntary employment' (1980:207).

However, having taken office and facing a situation of continuing and also expanding unemployment, the Fraser government offered other explanations as its strategies to curb the recession and increase employment failed, the most notable of which was that the recession was due to international economic forces beyond their control (Abbey and Catley, 1980:198). The government sought to overcome the recession with a number of deflationary strategies, reflected in their slogans which,

> shifted from an investment-led recovery in 1976, to a consumer-led recovery in 1977 (for election purposes) to an international economy-led recovery in 1978 (Abbey and Catley, 1980:198).

The main consequence of their strategies, however, was to increase unemployment (Windschuttle, 1979:24). This was not simply a consequential side effect of their strategies, but an intended part of the strategy. This was based on the conventional view that inflation, the consequence of 'real wage overhang' must be reduced in order to restore profits, and that, following economic orthodoxy, this must be accompanied by a corresponding

unemployment factor before the restoration of the profit:wages ratio and the restoration of realistic inflation levels would bring economic recovery and full employment. In the meantime workers would have to suffer the burden of unemployment as a deliberate policy. However, inflation did not fall, recovery was not heralded in, and unemployment continued to grow.

As with Whitlam, the Fraser government's strategy backfired, but given the way this government had siezed office and its hyperbole claiming expertise as economic managers it was placed in a very awkward position. It had been hoist by its own petard, right into a rationality crisis, so that even the pro-business journal The Bulletin was capable of running a rather critical article entitled, "Fraser at Mid-Term: Popularity Low, Credibility Lower", in which while agreeing that external factors such as the upward movement in oil prices (and therefore beyond the control of the Australian government) would adverseley affect the economy, it goes on to point out that,

> when Gough Whitlam, as Prime Minister, sought to use the same excuse to explain away his government's economic shortcomings, Fraser, as Opposition leader was derisive. He can hardly complain if his opponents, following the example of the pre-1975 Fraser, are similarly derisive now.

and goes on to add, with an implicitly rather more critical tone,

> Probably Fraser's largest achievement has been to abate the inflationary spiral. In the middle of his present parliamentary term, there is relatively little else on which he can look back with gratification, though now he has been Prime Minister for four years (The Bulletin, July 17, 1979).

But, as shown (table 1), even the rate of inflation was to begin to rise again, while unemployment (table 3) was to accelerate. Thus it was that, in Habermas' terms (1976:61ff), the government, because of enduring economic crisis, adopted 'contradictory steering imperatives' which caused it to 'fumble' into rationality deficits, causing its actions to 'become more and more muddled'. This was particularly true in the Government's handling of youth unemployment.

While it is true that overall unemployment in Australia was by 1978 and 1979 the worst it had been since the 1930s, for young people in Australia, particularly the 15-19 year old group, it was catastrophic. There was a huge upsurge in unemployment for this group, beginning in 1975 (table 4), and the youngest-aged school leavers had proportionately the highest incidence of unemployment (see for example the situation for 1979 in table 5).

Table 4
Unemployment Rates by Age, Australia, 1964 to 1979.

		Unemployment rates %			
		15-19 years	20-24 years	25 years and over	All Ages
May	1964	3.4	1.7	1.0	1.4
	1965	2.8	1.5	0.9	1.2
	1966	3.0	1.3	1.0	1.4
	1967	3.8	1.6	1.1	1.6
	1968	3.7	2.2	1.0	1.6
	1969	3.0	2.0	1.0	1.4
	1970	3.0	1.9	1.0	1.3
	1971	3.3	2.0	1.1	1.5
	1972	4.6	3.0	1.4	2.0
	1973	4.7	2.4	1.2	1.8
	1974	4.2	2.4	1.1	1.6
	1975	10.1	5.6	2.5	3.9
	1976	12.1	5.4	2.5	4.1
	1977	15.2	6.9	3.0	5.1
	1978	16.0	8.5	4.1	6.2
	1979	17.0	9.3	3.7	6.2

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, The Labour Force).

Table 5
Unemployment Rates by Age, Australia August 1979.

Age	Unemployment rate %
15	27.2
16	26.3
17	18.8
18	14.3
19	12.7
20	10.4
21	9.6
22	8.9
23	6.6
24	5.1

(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, The Labour Force).

The reaction of the government was, to say the least, confused and contradictory. Besides continuing with a number of 'band-aid' programs initiated under Labor (e.g. the Community Support Scheme for Unemployed Youth, the National Employment and Training Scheme) and introducing its own Education Program for Unemployed Youth, it also adopted a rather primitive stance against unemployed young people. Employing much of the rhetoric of the 'dole-bludger' myth they proclaimed that young people are often unemployed by choice rather than necessity: it was an attack in which they gained wide support from the media. (The involvement of both government and media in promoting this view of unemployed youth is best described in Windschuttle 1979:155ff).

Taking up Habermas' point that authorities have limited information, planning capacity and coordination so that they become dependent upon information from their clients while at the same time being unable to preserve sufficient distance from them necessary for making independent decisions (1976:62), it is not surprising to find close similarities between the Government view and that of the media. Contradictions in one are reflected in the other. Thus we find The Bulletin, serving up strong doses of 'dole-bludger' rhetoric, and arguing that people were unemployed because they chose not to work. For instance, in an article headed "How to beat the dole queue" (September 5, 1978:43) they give examples of people who have created their own businesses to suggest this as a possibility for the mass of the unemployed, and in another article, "Jobs for those who look" (January 22, 1980:19) suggest that there is no real shortage of jobs but simply an inefficient job allocation system. The bulk of the column is devoted to 'cases' where employers find it hard to find genuine job seekers.

In another article, "The real story on unemployment" (The Bulletin, November 6, 1979) youth unemployment is treated simply as a phenomenon resulting from the application of economic principles, viz.,

> Where there are not enough workers it is because wages being offered are too low, and, conversely, where there are too many workers relative to jobs it is a clear sign of over-high wages (The Bulletin, November 6, 1979:20).

Additionally, the bulk of the article is, once more, devoted to two arguments. One is to suggest that talk about a much larger pool of 'hidden unemployed' is not only inaccurate but is also part of a 'propagandistic myth'. The other is an argument that most youth on the dole were not genuinely seeking work, a view supported in the following column of that issue which reports an interview with the then Employment Minister Ian Viner, headlined "Keen kids deserve a chance" (ibid:27). Again, this column presents the view that although youth unemployment was high due to economic factors there were labour shortages in certain areas, and that there were 'undercurrents of over-selectivity' on the part of job seekers. Thus we find youth unemployment being acknowledged, but mainly in terms of personal deficiency and not as a structural economic fact. As time proceeded, however, even The Bulletin began to acknowledge the growing manifestation of youth unemployment by printing a brief column about life on the dole that presented a glimpse of the frustration and destructive bitterness of young people in that situation (The Bulletin, January 8, 1980:22). Even this, however, bears evidence of being a token gesture, for, rather facetiously, it featured the so-called "Salami Sisters", a pair of young women apparently writing from their own experiences but in a style which tends to trivialise the issues.

Legitimation-motivation crisis in education

Habermas has argued that it is possible for economic crisis and rationality crisis to extend into two parallel identity crises, viz. legitimation and motivation crises, first proposed in Habermas, 1976, and subsequently modified in response to his critics (Thompson and Held, 1980). The first occurs where the legitimation system fails to provide requisite levels of motivation, and the latter where the socio-cultural system fails to

provide the requisite levels of 'action-motivating meaning' (1976:49). Events leading up to, and during that period of the Transition Education Program suggest the presence of these two 'crisis tendencies' in Australia, following on the continued economic crisis and the apparent rationality crisis in government. The evidence for this is to be found in the experience of youth in Australia at that time.

There appears to have been great reluctance to admit that there was a massive youth unemployment problem, both on the part of government and sections of the media. Thus we find that, shortly after the announcement of the Transition from School to Work Policy (which also, although officially acknowledging the existence of youth unemployment as a problem, nevertheless implied that the solution lay in improving skills and attitudes in youth rather than having to provide jobs), The Bulletin still steadfastly attacked the view that the real source of unemployment was lack of jobs, replying to Labor Party M.P. Mick Young's assertion of this by saying,

> He is simply wrong in saying that the problem is sheer lack of work. Labour shortages exist side by side with unemployment (The Bulletin, December 11, 1979:22).

However the evidence to the contrary is overwhelming.

The high incidence of general unemployment is sufficient to create legitimation and motivation crises in society, but where there is an emotive abundance of youth unemployment, there is even greater tendencies towards these crises. How does legitimation crisis arise? Habermas says,

> The public realm (Offentlichkeit), set up for effective legitimation, has above all the function of directing attention to topical areas - that is, of pushing other themes, problems and arguments below the threshold of attention and, thereby, of withholding them from opinion formation (Habermas, 1976:70).

Legitimation crisis arises therefore when the political- administrative system is unable to divert attention away from evidence of economic and rationality crisis. Hence, in the Australian context, if unemployment could be kept at

acceptable proportions, or failing this could be contained within socially powerless sections of society, or perhaps 'hidden' within other institutions such as the education system, then legitimation crisis could be averted. Alternatively, if neither of these were not possible, then economic crisis could be attributed to the ineptitude of previous governments. This latter course, as we have seen, is precisely what happened. However, with the growth of youth unemployment to the extent where the vast majority of households in Australia had the experience of unemployment among its members or else knew someone who was unemployed, attention could not be diverted from the problem.

Not being able to divert attention from the problem of unemployment the government, particularly in view of its claims to office, was faced with a legitimation crisis. The response to this, both on the part of government and the media, was to try to divert the responsibility for this elsewhere, so that in much the same way as economic crisis was attributed to 'the real wage overhang' now youth unemployment was attributed to the 'failure' of the education system.

This revealed itself in a series of combined attacks against teachers and schools by sections of the media. These suggested that high youth unemployment was fundamentally the cause of the State education system's failure to adequately prepare school leavers for entry into the workforce. The Bulletin, for example carried articles like "A wasteland where there should be knowledge" (September 8, 1979), and "Why teachers aren't what they used to be" (December 25, 1979), assuring their affluent business-community audience that the private education system, substantially occupied by their own children, was much superior. The main features of this attack have been detailed by Windschuttle (1979). In addition, much of the attack was quite spurious (see Foley, 1981) and based on circular validation between press and politicians (Teese, 1981). In this latter process, statements by politicians attacking State education as deficient would be reproduced in the press, by

which time mere assertions would be reported as factual statements. Subsequently these statements, now accorded the status of facts by publication in the press, were reproduced as hard evidence by the same government parliamentarians who had initially generated the viewpoints (Teese, 1981:113).

Although I would not argue that the State education system is without blemish, these attacks can only be interpreted as a conscious attempt to re-legitimise government actions by attributing manifest evidence of failure, perceived in youth unemployment, to the failure of education. Thus, long standing issues in Australian education, viz. the comparison between the private and State education systems and the so-called standards debate, provided a ready-made context from which to provide shots useful in the scapegoating of education. To some extent, of course there was prima face evidence that the non-government system was superior to that of the state system (for a comprehensive discussion see Gilmour and Lansbury, 1978). Statistics showed quite clearly that more students stayed on at school to the final HSC year in non-government schools than state schools, and moreover that their success rate at HSC was higher (Schools Commission, 1979). Furthermore the probability of their obtaining employment or in proceeding to tertiary education was greater than for state school students (Jones, 1982). In addition to the factors giving bias to such figures (such as the defacto expulsion of 'failing' students from non- government schools and their replacement by 'successful' students from the state systems) and notwithstanding the research indicating the close relationship between success on these factors and socio-economic status, from Kohn and Schooler (1969) through to Connell et al., (1982), the very awareness of this was an essential element in creating a motivation crisis among students, particularly working class students, in the state secondary schools. Knowledge that one is unlikely to obtain work even though one stays on to the completion of HSC, creates a strong disincentive to treat education seriously.

Consequently, as a result of the state-administrative system seeking to overcome legitimation crisis by diverting attention away from government and towards the education system, the practice of scapegoating served mainly to generate motivation crisis among young people. Though the arguments might be spurious and circular, nevertheless, they touched a responsive nerve in Australian society, and many accepted the view that high youth unemployment was due to deficiences in the State education system. Consequently, there was renewed concern about the content and pedagogy of schools as parents worried about their offspring's job opportunities and career pathways in the face of shrinking vacancies.

Thus education was being squeezed from above and from below. Above, from the state-administrative system came allegations attributing much of the cause of unemployment to the school system. Below, from parents came pressure as they expressed anxiety for their children. As Apple puts it,

> Industrialists and state bureaucrats wish to make schools efficient, to enable them to meet the ideological and 'manpower' requirements of the economy. The tax problems generated by the economic crisis contribute a good deal to the attempts of the same people to make education more efficient. At the same time, because of a crisis in legitimacy there is pressure from 'below', from many of the parents of students from racial, sexual, class and interest groups to make schools responsive to the often competing needs that each of these groups have identified (Apple, 1982:119).

Into this context of crisis in the economy, rationality crisis in politics, legitimation crisis in government, and motivation crisis in education, came the Transition Education Program.

The Transition from School to Work Policy

On November 22nd, 1979, Senator Carrick, the then Liberal Government Minister for Education, made two Ministerial Statements to the Senate. The first was a statement indicating the government's response to the (Williams) Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training. The inquiry was set up by the Fraser government in September 1976, and the committee's

report was tabled in parliament by the Prime Minister on the 22nd March 1979, exactly eight months before Senator Carrick's statement.

The second statement followed immediately on the first, and was the Joint Ministerial Statement on behalf of himself and the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs, Mr. Viner. This Statement announced the government's Comprehensive Policy for Transition from School to Work. It was no accident that the two Statements were made together, for the policy announced in the second follows on from that flowing from the first. Indeed, close affinity between the Transition from School to Work Policy and the Williams Report is not merely by implication, for contained in the Statement on the Williams Report is the first indication to parliament that there was to be a Transition from School to Work Policy, for the Senator said,

> The Government has decided that the following policy objectives will guide its responses to the Williams report: Firstly, qualitative improvement of the TAFE sector; secondly, strengthening the teaching of basic skills in schools; thirdly, facilitating the transition of young people from school to work including the development of a comprehensive policy for youth in transition; fourthly, improving the quality and availability of labour market information; fifthly, improving skills training arrangements; sixthly, strengthening and concentrating research in universities; and seventhly, continuing monitoring and adjustments of the education system (Senate Hansard, November 22, 1979:2785).

History reveals that more attention was devoted to some of these objectives than others. Nevertheless, it is clear that the intentions of the government in announcing its Transition Education Policy are to be understood in the thrust of the Williams Report.

Commentators have, quite correctly, indicated that the Williams Report (1979) takes a conservative view of education and is essentially a manpower planning document which encourages the concept of education in those terms, so that it is essentially concerned with the preparation of youth for participation in the workforce according to industry's requirements. Thus it is a document which supports the interests of capital (Young 1981, Freeland &

Sharp, 1981). Commissioned by the Fraser Government, it contrasts sharply with the Karmel Report (1973) commissioned by the previous Whitlam Government. The contrast between these two reports has been summed up as follows.

> The Karmel Report is overtly and self-consciously egalitarian. The Williams Report is covertly elitist ... There can be no greater contrast between the value orientations of the two reports than that which is summed up in the Williams Report's emphasis on preparation of students for work by educating them in work related attitudes and the Karmel Committee's statement that schools should be places "where the influence of the market place do not dictate the price placed upon individual talents ..."
>
> The Karmel Committee's emphasis on education for more equal participation, for increased political participation, for cultural diversity, and for a less hierarchical society is in stark contrast to the Williams Report's emphasis on manpower supply and fiscal control (Young, 1981:9f).

Freeland and Sharp (1981) are highly critical of the Williams Report, believing it to endorse meritocratic ideology while at the same time providing this with some legitimacy by enmeshing it within the rhetoric of liberalism. They see it as an attack on democratic educational ideology and practice, an attack grounded in economic theory. They say,

> Keynesian economics is rejected and there is a reversion to classical political economy with an invocation of Adam Smith, and to neo-classical marginal productivity theory ... Marginal productivity theory underlies the Report's concern for the production function of education and the allocative and cost effectiveness of educational expenditure. Education at all levels should be monitored to ensure the maximum output, in terms of human capital, and to minimise wastage. Throughout the Report there is an invocation of the market forces' capacity to efficiently allocate available labour power and to indicate the most appropriate distribution of educational opportunities. Hence the Report's concern for more effective means of labour power planning and the Committee's flirtation with the idea of educational vouchers and accountability (Freeland and Sharp, 1981:43).

In this view therefore, the Williams Report concurs with the prevailing economic orthodoxy of the time, which, as we have seen earlier, represents a concerted transfer of social resources (in a word, wealth) from workers and to capital in the belief that this would restore profits and consequently revive

the economy. In addition to this however, it provides fresh legitimation for government policy in education, affording particular support to the view that the education system needs to be more closely aligned to the requirements of industry, on ideological grounds equating the education process with the supply of labour.

Thus when the emergence of the Transition from School to Work Policy is seen in the context of the prevailing social conditions, the implications are that the Policy had at least two clear if unstated objectives: one, to align education more closely with the needs of industry and the economic and political strategies of government; two, to supply renewed legitimation for the state-administrative system's steering performances for the economic system.

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